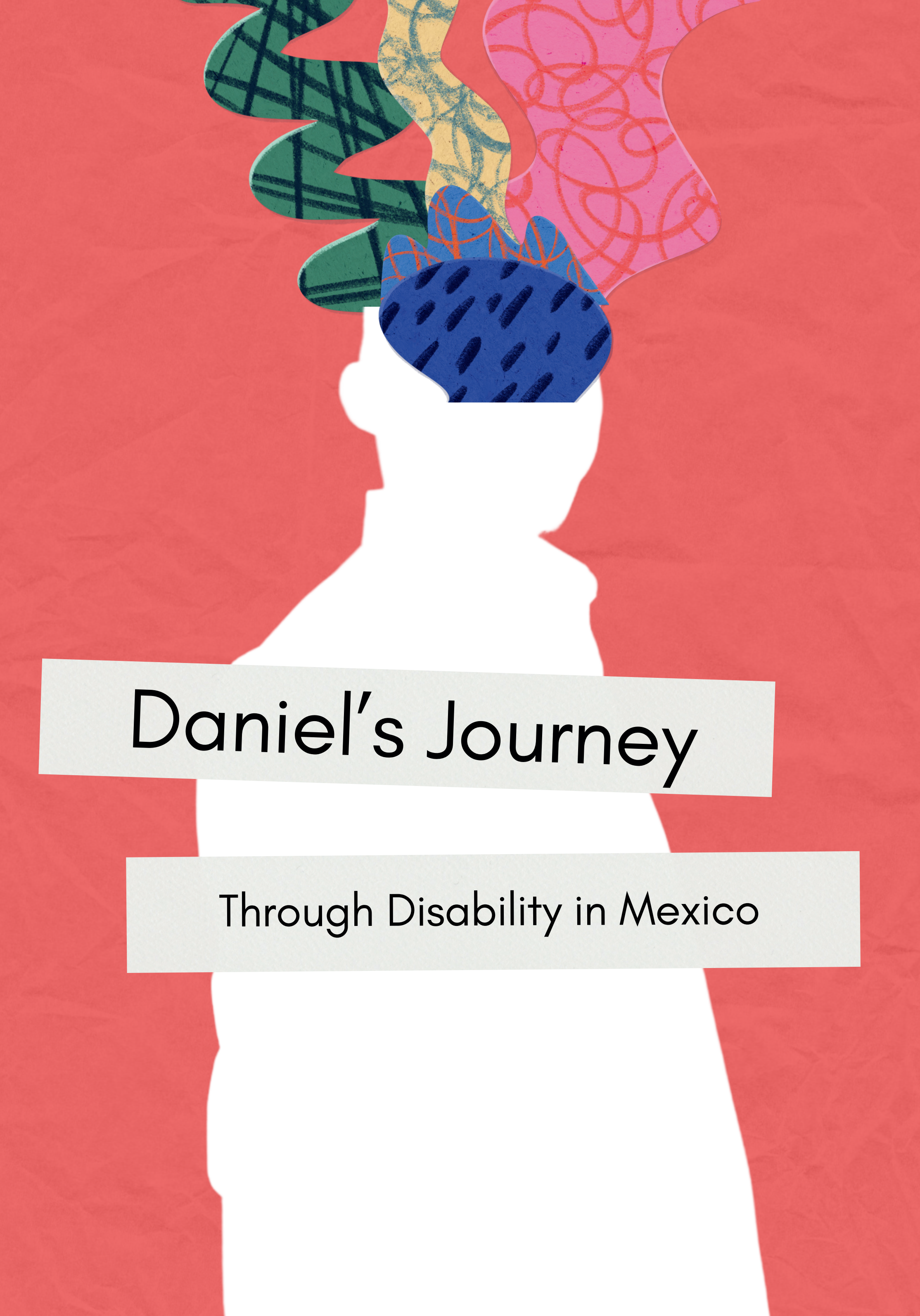
Disability in Mexico
Discapacidad en México

Daniel and Ella

According to the 2011 General Act on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, **a person with a disability is defines as "any person who, for congenital or acquired reasons, has one or more physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, whether permanent or temporary, and who, when interacting with the barriers imposed by the social environment, may prevent their full and effective inclusion, on an equal basis with others."**

Discussing disability in Mexico **prompts us to critically examine American understandings of disability theory**, allowing us to identify theories and conceptions about disability that can be applied to **enhance solidarity** with individuals with disabilities in Mexico. Additionally, **we can learn from the disabled Mexican community and apply these insights to our understanding of disability, specifically, community building**.



Daniel's Journey

Through Disability in Mexico

In my time in America, I have become familiar with topics such as disability, and indeed, **disability and the idea of normalcy have become a big part of my thinking over the last year**. This is new to me, as I was not born in the United States, but rather in Mexico. Therefore, during my most recent return to Mexico, I applied the education I had recently received from CSU regarding disability to my communities and compared disability in Mexico City, a rich modern cultural city, and my rural hometown, located high above Mexico, known as Mineral del Chico.

-Daniel Perez Scott

My first stop was Mexico City, a metropolitan city that represents **almost everything good about Mexico, while also embodying everything I dislike about the country**. It truly is a dichotomy, and I struggle to decide how I feel about it. In Roma and Condesa, there is a unique blend of food, culture, and a sense of community that is hard to find elsewhere. Polanco boasts high-end dining food of the most extravagant quality and beautiful architecture that represents the progress and modernity of Mexico. Yet 20 miles away is Tepito, a representation of the inequality, violence, trafficking, racism, and femicide that have been a part of Mexico for far longer than anyone would care to admit. **Disabled people sit at the crossroads of this violence and economic inequality as an afterthought, acknowledged as an issue that exists but dismissed as "not a priority." Disabled people are often given lip service but never assistance for all disabled bodies.**

My first interview was with Rep. Zamora, a representative of Sinaloa to the Mexican Congress in Mexico City. This interview allowed me to meet other people, such as the chair of the committee on Disability. From these conversations, it seemed as though e**veryone understood the problem. The government acknowledged that disability in Mexico is a serious problem and had drafted and passed a mountain of legislation attempting to address it**. But therein lies the issue, the repeated problem of enforcement. **The formal sectors of Mexico generally comply with requirement**s; office buildings, the Bank of Mexico, car dealerships, and similar establishments typically have all the necessary equipment, tools, resources, and government verification to comply with disability legislation. However, **disability is understood here in a very narrow definition, along with a similarly narrow conception of normalcy. A disabled person in Mexico is someone whose motor functions are not considered "normal." Most other forms of disability—temporary disabilities or disabilities that are unseen—are not even a topic of conversation. The focus is primarily on an individual's limbs and their ability to participate in the economy.**

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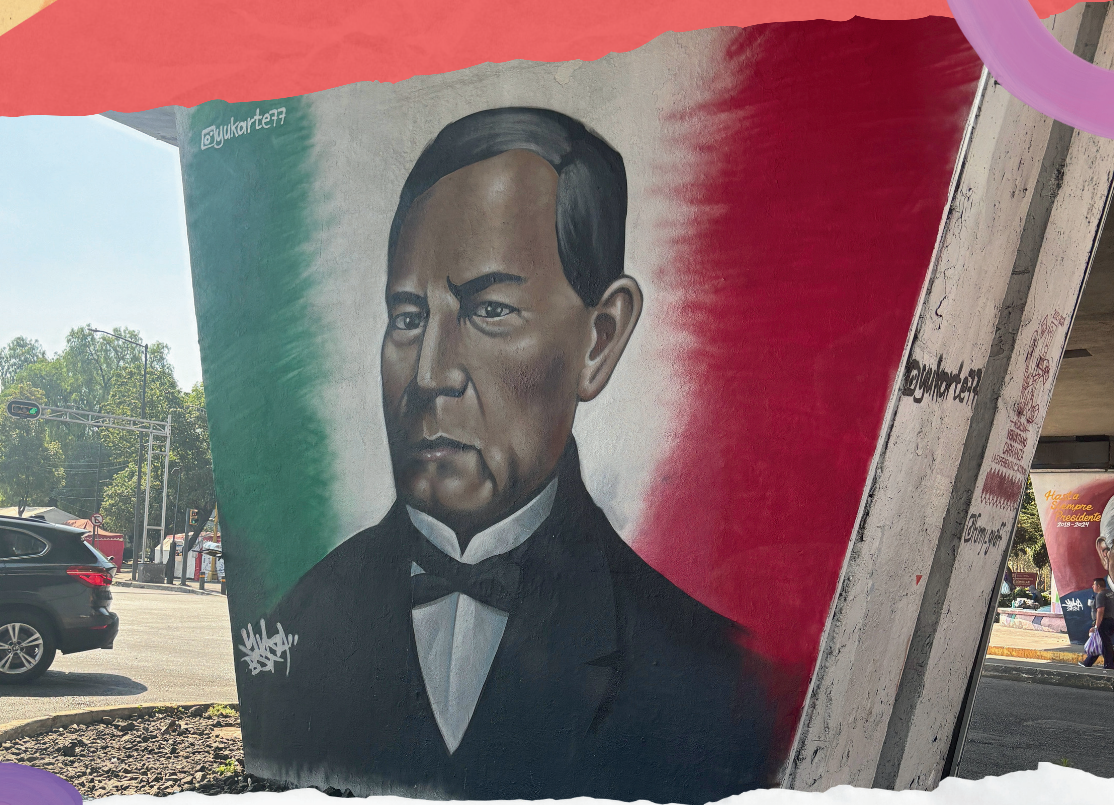
Reforma, Polanco, and the wealthier neighborhoods of Mexico City have **excellent disability compliance**, comparable to that of American cities like Denver and Seattle. Bus stops are elevated to ensure the bus floor and the platform are level, providing easy entry and exit. Metro stations—both underground and aboveground- have elevators to access stops. **Wealthier individuals often have cars equipped with disability ramps or can hire assistants, which is a common practice. Indeed, being wealthy in Mexico City allows you to live an independent life as a disabled person, which in Mexico is considered a luxury. The class system in Mexico prevents those who are poor from accessing such goods and services.**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Every conversation about improving accessibility in Mexico centered on money, specifically the abundance of it or, more commonly, its scarcity. Nowhere was this more apparent than when I visited my hometown with my disability at the forefront of my mind

I interviewed a person I met on the street who was willing to answer questions but preferred to remain anonymous.

Me: Do you have a happy life?

Them: "Yes, I would say I do, but it's tough sometimes. Socially, it gets really hard, especially when dating or when everyone going to parties. But work-wise, it's great..........**I feel very happy in my work.**"

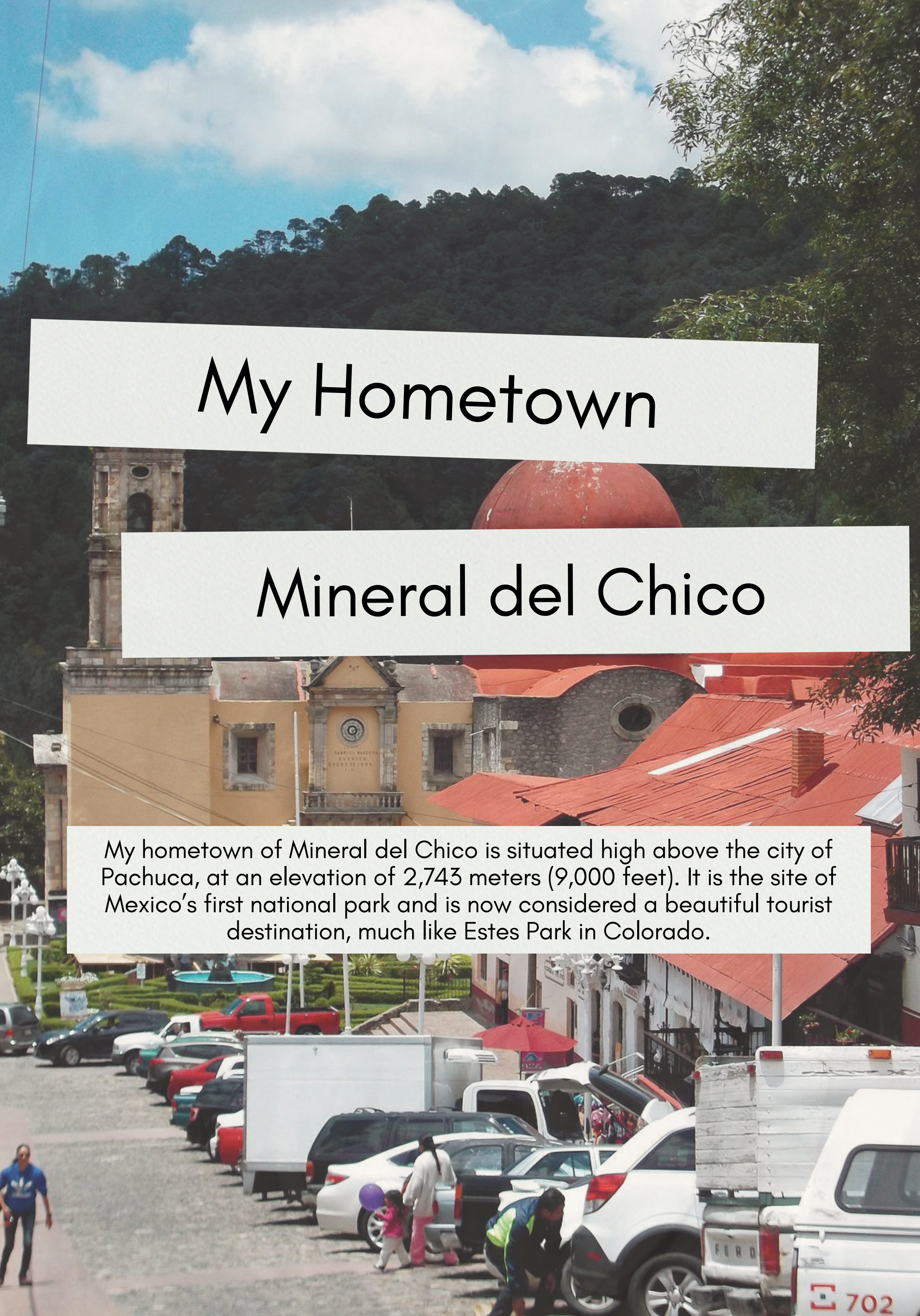
Me: Where do you work, if I can ask?

Them: "Yes, yes, yes, I work at the Museum of Natural and National Anthropology as the collections manager."

Me: And your home?

Them: "In my home, my apartment is all good, and so is my work here in the city. But I often **feel like I'm stuck in the bubble of Mexico City**. It's a very weird feeling to go back home(refers to out of Mexico city) and lose my independence."

This was the trend in Mexico City life, as disabled people are often accessible in upper-middle-class and affluent areas. However, venturing beyond those areas reveals a **dramatic lack of government support and assistance**.

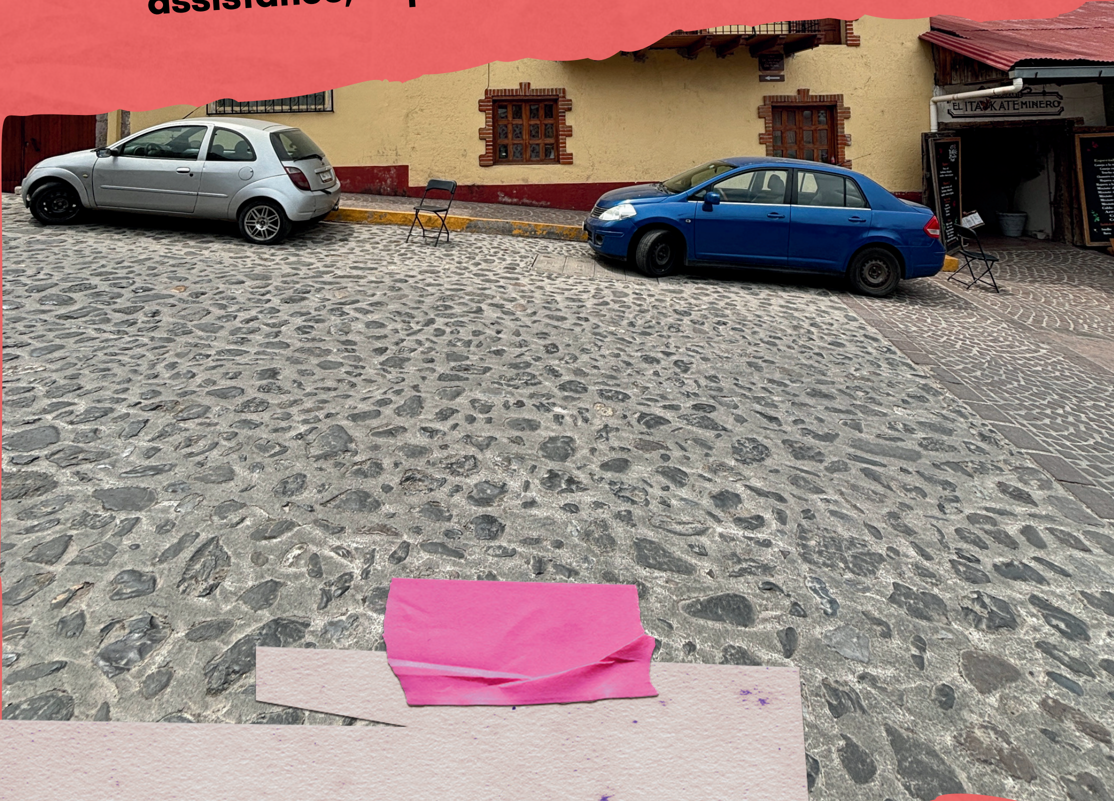


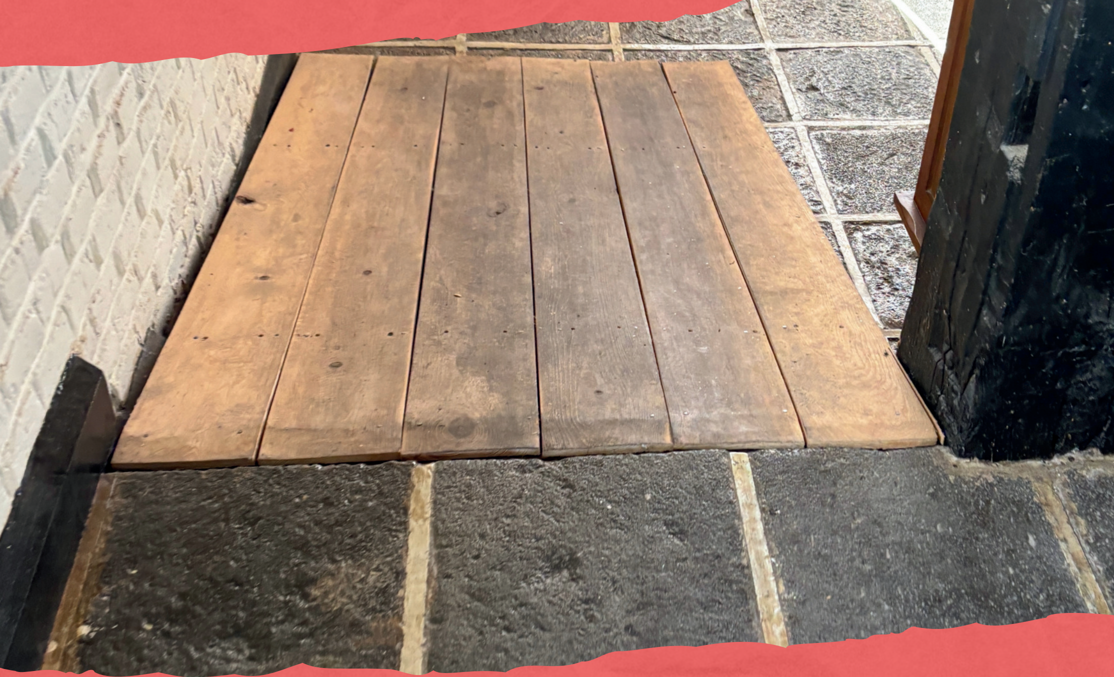
My Hometown

Mineral del Chico

My hometown of Mineral del Chico is situated high above the city of Pachuca, at an elevation of 2,743 meters (9,000 feet). It is the site of Mexico's first national park and is now considered a beautiful tourist destination, much like Estes Park in Colorado.

Yet the town's precarious position high atop the Occidental range presents numerous challenges when addressing disability. T**he entire town is almost hand-tailored to be inaccessible for those who are unable to walk or have motor-function-related disabilities**. The town is built on a 9% grade for most of its area. S**idewalks are split and cut to make room for the road, making wheelchair use on sidewalks impossible**. Traveling from downtown to the upper houses is difficult, as wheelchair users who must power their chairs themselves cannot navigate the steep grade, even if the road were flat, which it is not. The cobblestone roads exacerbate the issue, requiring tires much larger than standard wheelchair tires. **Even if the sidewalks were fixed, the steep grade makes it impossible to ascend under one’s power, necessitating assistance, expensive mobility devices, or both.**





In many ways, this is a town stuck in another time. The challenges presented by Mineral del Chico highlight the stark contrast between American and Mexican understandings of disability, particularly in rural areas.

During my interviews, I spoke with the town president and the tourism president. Both acknowledged the town's inaccessibility and were critical of its flaws. The president of tourism stated, "It's very tough—where do you even start here? There are no elevators until Pachuca, and the state will not provide us with the necessary resources. Honestly, I don't even think they could."

Still, there is a sincere attempt to improve accessibility in this small town. The president proudly showed me a new ramp that had been constructed to access the town market from the downtown area, as the market sits on an elevated plaza.

Family And Disability

Mexico's federal government introduced disability pensions of 1,310 pesos (US$58) per month in February 2019. The program aims to reach just 1 million out of the approximately 7 million people with disabilities in Mexico. **But the pensions are insufficient to live independently**. The **absence of other essential services**, such as accessible housing and transportation and professional assistants to support people with tasks of daily living, **also hinders many people from living independently**.

State laws and government practices also reinforce the dependence of people with disabilities on their families. In Oaxaca and Mexico City, **families are legally required to support adult relatives with disabilities, and the authorities often give the pension to the relatives to control.**

Family becomes the centerpiece of disability thinking in rural Mexico. **In my hometown, the 9% grade issue is resolved if a family member assists in pushing a wheelchair up the hill**. Sidewalks are not a problem if a family can provide a car and help a disabled individual enter and exit the vehicle. Despite being from here, it took me some time to understand this perspective. After spending so much time in America, I had adopted a more individualistic mindset. **Upon returning, I realized that while we both use the term "disability," the understanding in rural Mexico is inherently more familial than in America.**

The interviews I had with people with disabilities, especially those who require their family's assistance either later in life or throughout their lives, provide a better understanding of care. These communities strive to avoid the shame often associated with care and instead embrace the interdependence of family and community.

I asked a man, Sergio, a respected member of the community and a family friend, some personal questions, knowing I could do so without causing offense. One of the questions I asked him was blunt: "***Do you ever feel embarrassed***?" It was a deep question, especially for someone so esteemed.

Sergio: "Sometimes, kid, yes—it gets quite hard when I can't shit on my own. It's embarrassing and humiliating to be at this point in my life."

Me: "Do you do something to help with these feelings?"

Sergio: "I just remind myself of how God made each of us in His image and how I gave everything I had to my family, my work, my life. It helps... my kids and grandkids are there to help, and I feel much better when they do their part."

I found his use of the phrase "*do their part*" particularly compelling. To Sergio, this wasn't seen as an act of charity or a helping hand. Instead, it was understood as an obligation, an honor, and a duty for his family to assist their grandfather and father. This sentiment echoes a Japanese saying, ***shikata ga nai*—*"there's no choice.*"** If there's no choice, then there is no shame in it. I think this captures a valuable lesson, **unlearning the shame surrounding care, something that American society could benefit from reflecting upon. Yet, due to this system during COVID, there was an increased amount of violence against family dependents with disabilities due to this culture. Therefore, we have to critically point out the shortcomings and harm to disabled people, while understanding this system is the only system of care available. Rather, we can learn from their normalization of care and point out some of the harmful familial relations that occur in an able-bodied-disabled body family relationship.**

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Rural communities in Mexico teach us that **breaking the concept of normalcy and improving the lives of people with disabilities often starts at the family and community level.** While we should not allow familys to be the only source. One criticism I have, based on my experiences in both these worlds, is that American disability scholars sometimes **place too much emphasis on the role of the U.S. government**. While government involvement is important, ***disability activism must also hold a prominent place in communities and in other cultures understanding of care***.

Thank you for reading our zine

Photo credits to Daniel Scott-Perez.

Interviews all conducted and distributes with the consent of the interviewees.

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